

When the Strangers Come

by BYZ

Category: Halo

Genre: Adventure, Horror

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2012-11-28 08:44:53

Updated: 2012-11-29 18:36:50

Packaged: 2016-04-27 03:02:38

Rating: T

Chapters: 3

Words: 7,458

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Marines. Live to serve, serve to live. What happens when the ones you serve turn their backs on you, and what happens when your servitude is the fastest way to get you killed? A story of one of the UNSC's most catastrophic operations, and one of the biggest betrayals in military history. Read and Review please! Fixed the upload issue I had and Chapter 3 is good to read!

1. Goodbyes

****When the Strangers Come****

Sparks E. Skyler, Private****

0000000000000000000000000000 0000

"Babe, I'm home!"

Skyler eased the front door open and stepped inside the house. The sudden gust of frigid air was a welcomed respite from the deathly heat outside and he paused to lose himself in the sensational breeze for a fraction of a moment. Inhaling slowly, he eased the door shut behind him and gently placed his duffel bag down on the ground. The residential house was relatively new. Stark white walls sported little if any decoration aside from a few old pictures of family and friends and a few other knick knacks lay scattered throughout – mostly still in mundanely colored boxes piled in their respective corners.

His boots made a soft thumping noise as they traversed the polished hardwood floor. He moved north and into the dining room. A large table stood directly in the center of the spacious area upon a colorful tapestry, obviously much older than the house itself, and an even more dazzling chandelier dangled above. It swayed eloquently from side to side as the gentle current from the air conditioner connected with invisible feather like force. He took a moment to admire the silver lining and sparkling white designs that riddled the

surrounding walls. Among every room in the house, this one had been the most taken care of.

"We have to move again?" The voice caused his attention to deviate onto the archway that led into the kitchen. A woman emerged from the room with arms crossed. "You said this was the last time."

Skyler winced. The first response poised on the tip of his tongue was an inquiry to who had told her. He bit back, however, and settled on the blame undoubtedly belonging to the wives and girlfriends of the fellow Marines in his unit. He cursed them all silently. "I know, I know, Tiffany" He said. "Battalion is changing our station again." There was no point sugar coating it. His girlfriend had long ago learned to decipher his beat-around-the-bush technique when delivering bad news.

She pursed her lips and leaned against the wall. "But you saidâ€¦" She trailed off and averted her eyes out the nearby window. Miles upon miles of a neighboring farmer's wheat bathed in the rays of the sunlight while a subtle touching of the wind moved them like fields of perfectly synchronized swimmers performing some sort of dance. It was a cruel irony. Outside was the pictured perfection of paradise, and inside was an atomic bomb waiting to explode.

"I know," He pivoted his body to face her this time. "I justâ€¦" He paused and bit his lower lip. He just, what? He didn't have an answer. He didn't know why he was dragging this poor girl around the universe for him just because he wanted to fight the good fight.

She shifted. "You just _what_?" She choked on the last word and her eyes began to water. He winced even more at that. "You just _thought _this would be the last time? You just_ thought _that you wouldn't be lying to me this time?"

Her voice trembled with unbridled irritability, although she was far to kind hearted of a person to show outright anger on anyone. "Tiff," He began and dared a step closer. She held her ground. The two were separated by the table that was abnormally large for a duo of people and he decided to keep it that way for the moment. She hadn't made a move to round the piece of furniture and cross the proverbial line that separated the two 'sides' of the argument. "I don't have a say whether we move or not. It's not my decision. We go where the war is, you know that."

'No," Tiffany fired back. One arm reached up to wipe at her eyes with the shoulder strap of her white sundress. "How long have we been dating?"

Skyler cocked his head to the side. "Since high school," He stepped forward again and rested both hands against the top of one of the four chairs fitted around the table. "Why?"

She pushed off the wall and moved towards the table. Eyeliner followed the pathways her tears left down the sides of her cheeks even as she pulled one of the chairs out and sat down. "We're so young, Skyler." She sniffed. "You're barely twenty-one, and I'm barely twenty!"

Moving his weight from one foot to the other, a sinking feeling in his gut guessed where this was going. He eyed the chair next to her

before deciding not to tempt fate and instead slid into the one directly opposite, still keeping to his side of the room. "Listen," His voice lowered to barely above a whisper and outstretched both hands onto the table in wordless beckoning. Gingerly, she took them, and he squeezed. "People are saying the war is almost over. That the Covenant is retreating and that we've won." It was all false propaganda he knew, but desperate times called for desperate measures. "Just one or two more transfers and I know we'll be settled in."

Her eyes locked onto his in that way that most everyone's did when making love or after sharing a passionate first kiss. It was the look of true, unbridled committed feelings — feelings for one another that just kept growing no matter how much they aged, as long as they aged together. Skyler drank in her beauty for the first time in far too long. Sun kissed golden hair curled down just below her shoulders and tranquil blue eyes that could stop the hearts of many men, and were on the fast track to stopping his yet again, were easily the most distinguished features on her heart shaped face. Lips that could curve into a gleaming smile at any moment that gave even the darkest situations a bit of light were knitted into a tight frown. On long deployments he kept a picture of the two of them clipped on the interior of his helmet in case he needed a moral boost. Most nights, though, he found himself simply gazing upon her natural beauty. He leaned back and squeezed her hands into his. To him, the woman in front of him was as perfect as they came.

And his gut told him he was about to lose her.

"Skyler—" Her voice lowered to a whisper as well. "I love you."

"I love you too."

Both sat wordlessly for what seemed like hours. Tiffany wept silently — eyes on the table below her and Skyler clenched his jaw. He felt helpless. Every other time he was not the reason for her break downs, and _always _was he able to remedy even the worst of situations. Right now he felt like a goddamn deer in the headlights of a truck. Outside, the wheat had ceased its graceful dance and remained perfectly poised like it was watching the happenings inside the house as a child would a tantalizing movie. Seconds passed, then minutes, before she finally looked up and offered him a feigned smile.

The smile was not one someone might produce after a heated argument had been reconciled, or one that may incline she was giving him another chance. It was a sad smile that longed for happier times. "I'm so sorry."

It felt like someone had plunged a knife into his chest and twisted it relentlessly. Her hands slowly slipped away from his as she rose. He wanted to yell. To scream, to beg for to stay, but when his mouth opened nothing came out. Memories flashed in his mind of them. First neighbors in grade school, then their first kiss, the inevitable declaration they were dating their third year of high school, Skyler joining the UNSC at the age of twenty after taking two years off, Tiffany promising to be with him no matter what happened. "You promised—" He finally managed to whisper.

She paused halfway to the archway and turned her head. "Did you say something?" She sniffled again.

"You promised." He said, a bit louder this time. It was no more than a show of desperation. The only thing worse than traveling four times in one year simply to fend off the Covenant was making the fifth trip alone. "You promised you'd never leave."

Another silence befell both as Skyler rose. Both his palms spread evenly across the table. Tiffany's lower lip trembled and she shook her head. "That was a long time ago. We were teenagers."

Skyler was having none of it. "We were in love, Tiffany. We're still in love. This will work, I know it will."

"You just don't get it, do you?" She choked back another stream of tears. "I'm miserable. I hate this. I hate having to go to bed worried about whether I'm going to hear about you the next day when you're on your deployments. I hate having to move. I hate having to make new friends everywhere I go." She paced quickly back towards the table. "But most importantly I hate being alone. I hate, hate, hate being alone for months!" It was the loudest he had ever heard her get, albeit it wasn't even to the point of her yelling. It sounded more like a mixture of choking sobs and the first words that came to her mind. "Dammit I'd do anything for you! Anything! Just not this, Skyler."

There was something behind her eyes -a deep sadness. It didn't take a genius to figure out that the strenuous and lonely lifestyle of a UNSC soldier's estranged significant other had broken her. Behind the false façade of normality, the once bubbly and outgoing woman had deflated into a dark state of depression and regret. The emotional knife that twisted inside of him was now stabbed repeatedly through his heart and he slumped back down in the chair. He must have looked just as miserable as she had felt for the past year. Sitting in his dull grey BDUs and fighting back his own tears. Hell, he almost took pity on himself. "I'm sorry."

Again, she wiped the tears away from her face and straightened her posture. "I'm moving to Reach. My uncle teaches at one of the academies." Her voice had turned stoic and calm. "He says if I hurry I can make it before the semester starts."

His eyes never left the table. Both hands cupped over one another, as if trying to keep her final touches from escaping. "I hope you find everything you ever wanted, Tiffany." He found himself mumbling. It hurt, but, he was sincere about it. He had spent the last year unknowingly ruining this woman's life apart. He'd be damned if it was left on a bitter note.

He didn't hear her move for a few seconds. His thumbs twiddled amongst each other and his right foot began tapping habitually against the ground - a nervous tick. "I will never stop loving you." Skyler looked up when she said that. She stared down at him through stray bangs and tear stained eyes. "You'll never know how much I do. When the war is over, please, come find me if you can. I can't promise I'll wait for you but no matter what I find on Reach I want to know that you turned out alright."

He only nodded and watched as she turned on a heel and disappeared around the corner. Moments later he heard the door open. Part of him hoped he wouldn't hear it close. Part of him wanted her to rush back

in, embrace him, and move on from the traumatizing day. He found himself sucking in breath, and only when the resounding click of the door shutting echoed through the house did he release it. The sound rang hollow in his mind and it felt like a part of him had been violently ripped away.

Hours passed. The sunlight that gleamed through the windows so vibrantly disappeared slowly throughout the remainder of the day. Skyler wasn't quite sure why he didn't move. Maybe a string of hope still attached itself to him, reassuring him that the love of his life would come back even after the night sky shrouded the residence in a hopeless black. The air conditioner ran through the evening and even the icy outside temperature copulated with the artificial cooler didn't usher the smallest of movements from the Marine.

Finally, a series of knocks rattled against his front door. At first he didn't bother to even get up and answer it. A few Minutes later the knocking increased ten fold. Still, he didn't move, and finally he heard the door being opened and footsteps not very dissimilar to his own shattering the eerie silence. "Hello?" The voice called out.

The voice was familiar and Skyler turned to investigate when he saw the shadowy figure stroll into view. He had to squint to properly identify the man, and when he did he cleared his throat. "Danny?" His voice was which could probably be accredited to lack for fluids.

"Sparky?" The man reached around in the dark for a few moments before he managed to locate the light switch. Skyler's eyes screamed in protest as light struck them harder than a knife to flesh and he rubbed at them feverishly for a few moments. "What the hell are you doing sitting alone in the dark?"

Skyler turned slightly in his seat and debated whether he should let the man know what had transpired of the prior afternoon. He wasn't sure he wanted to embarrass himself with letting everyone now just how he'd failed to keep Tiffany from waning away from him; especially after all they had been through. On the other hand Danny was his best friend. Both had joined the Marine Corps at around the same age and bonded remarkably well all through basic training. Working his jaw from side to side, he rose so he wouldn't arouse suspicion to his glum state and sighed. "Tiffany left, man."

Danny was a fair looking man by any woman's standards, and a comic at heart, but even he dared not attempt any of his goofy smiles that eased even some of the tensest situations. "Oh man," He breathed and stepped forward. "I'm really sorry, dude, are you ok?"

Skyler's shoulders rose and fell in a menial shrug. The two must have looked ridiculous by Marine standards. Both still donned their BDUs and were talking about feelings, or, 'feelings and shit, man', as most enlisted personal referred to relationship talk as. "I'll be fine." It was a bold faced lie and he knew it. Regardless of the unwritten rules about lying to your best friend, he'd rather risk a deduction of 'bro' points from his comrade than suffering one of his terrible relationship lectures.

"Good." Danny reached into his pocket and withdrew a pair of keys. "Because we're going out tonight, and I need a

wingman."

000000000000000000000000000000 000000

****Hey, thank you so much for reading! I promise things are going to get really good as this story develops! If you'd be so kind as to review with any questions, comments or any constructive criticisms you might have I'd really appreciate it! :) ****

2. Psych Evals and Lawfully Stolen Ships

****Chapter 2****

000000000000000000000000000000 0000000000000000000000

** Raines P. Amanda, ONI**

_Amanda subconsciously gnawed on the end of the pen as her fingers danced across the data pad's screen. "How many will be on board again?" _

_ Her younger compatriot's eyes flickered down to the folder splayed across the metallic desk. The room was quite barren other than the two agents and their cluttered work station. A fan swirled overhead to mediate the room's temperature, but other than that it could very well be a jail cell. Barely any light was allowed through the small window in the corner. "A little over seven-"_

_ "Exact numbers, Ryan," She hadn't even looked up from her work to chastise the young man. "There's no need to shirk our duties."_

_ Ryan nodded and cleared his throat. "Seven hundred and twenty nine UNSC personal, mostly marines and technicians. There is a small contingent of orbital drop shock troopers planning to get off on Haling." He turned the paper over. "One thousand two hundred and eight civilian families of enlisted personal, including the Admiral's wife and daughter. All of them will be transferred back to a base on Earth before the marines head to the front."_

_ Amanda nodded. "I see." She moved the pen from one corner of her mouth to the other. "Subject B will be applied before the ship reaches Earth. Have the Admiral's escape pod primed and ready to go immediately."_

_ "Yes, Ma'am," There was a hesitation in her protÃ©gÃ©'s voice, and the barest fidget in his form. It was just enough for her to pick up on out of her peripherals. _

_ "You don't agree?" She inquired coolly. Her fingers ceased in their work on the data pad. _

_ He didn't answer at first â€œ obviously weighing her verbal options carefully. Amanda respected that, and fought off a small smile. "Well," He began. "It just seems like a lot of lives to throw away is all, Ma'am."_

_ She barked a bit of laughter. "Agent Wells," She placed the data pad down and withdrew the pen from her mouth before intertwining her hands atop on the table. "For the first time in humanity's history we

are fighting a war and losing." She smoothed out the nonexistent wrinkles in her skirt before crossing her legs and leaning back. All in one well practiced motion. "A few hundred soldiers and a thousand civilians that probably hate us won't change that."_

_ He didn't nod, but the acknowledgment still left his lips, and that was good enough for her. "Yes. Ma'am."_

_ "Besides," Her fingers drummed the tabletop. "When this is over and done with, we'll have complete control of a weapon to destroy the Covenant." She let the words linger in the humid air for a few moments. "Send the orders out immediately. Dismissed."_

_ He nodded this time. "Of course, Ma'am." The chair screeched against the floor as he pushed it out like nails on a chalkboard. His steps were fluid, almost robotic, and paused only to give her a final fleeting glance and a question. "But why are we saving the Admiral?"_

_ Amanda considered that for a moment. "What this war doesn't lack for is cannon fodder like marines. It does lack capable Admirals. We have more ships than qualified commanders for them."_

_ He left after that, leaving the Spook in the dark. She looked around and grimaced before standing up and quickly walking out._

_ She hated the dark. _

000000000000000000000000000000 000000000

**Bannerman A. Trisha, Lance Corporal**

The chair was cold and stiff and she hated it. Being left in an empty room didn't help her already deteriorating mood either. She craned her neck to peer around for the umpteenth time since she had arrived and sighed. Award plaques and various laminated PHDs and doctorates hung on the walls so thick she could barely see the yellow wallpaper beneath them. Looking back to the desk and past a cup full of pencils she spied an inactive computer, and beyond that a picture of a middle-aged man with two younger girls. Daughters, obviously, or at least Trisha hoped her psychiatrist wasn't some pedophile.

"My daughters," The sudden answer solidified her assumption and she nearly jumped out of her chair. She blinked as the man rounded the desk from behind " dark brown irises reading over something inside of a chocolate colored folder behind narrow glasses. "Sorry," He offered an easy smile. "I didn't mean to scare you, Trisha. How are you doing tonight?"

Relaxing somewhat back into the uncomfortable seat, she folded both arms over her stomach. "You scared the hell outta me, doc."

A warm chuckle seemed to be his answer. He dropped down into his own chair and shut the folder before setting it to the side. "Night terrors?"

"Night terrors," She confirmed and spared a brief look out the nearby window. Night had come particularly early today, and along with them did the nightmares that seemed to be the bane of her existence for the past few months. "I don't know what it is. I just keep _seeing_

everyone."

"Seeing?" He arched an eyebrow and withdrew a small pad of paper from his shirt's pocket. "You mean Privates Jonathan Lang and Stella Kirkpatrick?" A pen was procured from the cup not long after and he jotted down the names.

"Yea," She nodded and watched his rhythmic writing. "I don't know what to do. The meds aren't helping."

The psychiatrist made a few grunting sounds as he continued to write before putting the pen down and looking across at her. "Military vaccinations are known to complicate, and sometimes stop, the use of civilian medicine. An immunity, if you will, now tell me," Both his elbows planted themselves on the desk and he propped his chin against his palm. "Do they ever say anything to you? Try to communicate?"

Trisha shot him an icy glance. "I'm crazy, doc, not some voodoo witch that talks to dead."

He snorted back laughter. "No, no, no," He shook his head. "That's not what I meant. Dreams of formerly deceased companions and friends have been linked to, in some cases, acute paranoia. In even fewer cases some psychologists hypothesize that the way those people died is a direct correlation to the reason of nightmares." He paused, but not near long enough for Trisha to interject. "Did you see them die? The wounds they sustained?"

She nodded her head and watched as he retrieved the pen again. Taking the hint, she leaned forward. "It was a misfire. A grenade primer got stuck on one of the loops on their pants and activated when they moved." She told the story as calm as she could, although her body began to shake involuntarily. "They were all torn up, doc. I was the closest medic on scene. Hell, I even saw the explosion." The man seemed to be writing everything down and she stopped to allow him to catch up. Only when he waved did she continue. "They were dead before I even got there. Shrapnel had punctured their lungs and several arteries along the upper body. If that didn't do it, heavy lacerations would have bled them to death."

He didn't say anything for a long while, merely nodded and reached over to the chocolate covered folder. "How long after did the nightmares start?"

"How close were they to you?"

"They were my best friends." She blinked. "I've known them since we were kids."

Another series of grunting and he flicked past a few pages. "Any prior interaction?"

"What?" She leaned back. "What do you mean?"

He stopped reading and peered back at her again. "How long before they were killed did you speak to them?"

She couldn't answer that immediately. It felt like it had been so long ago since the accident occurred. "Three hours, maybe

four."

Pleased with whatever he was staring at he snapped the folder shut again and discarded it beside him. "Interesting," He scratched at the stubble on his chin. "I don't have any different types of meds you can take. You've tried every medicinal reference I've given you, right?" When she nodded, he sighed. "And you refuse to take leave from your unit on the grounds of mental instability, correct?"

"I can't," The words came out more as a guttural growl than anything else, and she immediately checked herself. "I mean I leave tomorrow for the outer systems. I can't sacrifice combat deployment pay because I'm having problems sleeping, doc."

She saw him tense somewhat and run his hands down his face. An incoherent murmur arose from him before sharply clearing his throat. "You said your unit sustained heavy casualties your last deployment. Two were from the accidental grenade, and four from Covenant fire?"

Trisha nodded. "Yea,"

"Can you give me the names of those who are left? Not from your platoon, just your squad. And not the replacements."

She licked her dry lips to avoid chapping. "There's Privates Daniel Cooper, Skyler Sparks and Corporal Alisha Cunningham, myself, Sergeant Jason Ramirez and Lieutenant Michael Shiften."

He wrote these names down as well. "Are you close with all of them as well?"

Again, the question wasn't answered immediately. When she did finally offer an answer it stretched the line of the truth slightly. "I guess I was pretty close with Danny. I didn't really warm up to anyone else, though." She quickly changed the subject. "I feel like we're going around in circles, doc. You've asked all this before."

"I know," He recited bluntly. "You haven't tried to contact any of them on your shore leave? Don't go out drinking? Out to dinner? Movies?"

The interrogation hit a nerve and she pushed the chair out. It was true, and that was what made her the angriest. She hadn't even bothered to open up to anyone other than Danny in the unit. Even then, they had yet to get together when they shared leave. "I just want to get rid of these nightmares."

He had that damned chocolate folder in his hand again. If he saw her little movement of frustration he made no note or indication he had to her. "I took the liberty of pulling the pre-deployment psych evaluations of your squad mates."

So that was what was in the folder. "Yea, so?" Both her arms crossed ignorantly over her chest.

"You're the only one who suffers from nightmares."

"I know."

He sighed again. Both pointer and index finger rose to push up his glasses and rub at his temples. "I'm urging you to take a leave of absence due to your mental health. I was a soldier too, once, you know. I understand how a traumatizing situation like that could prove detrimental in the middle of a firefight."

She shrugged again " quickly putting stomping out any flames of reasonable conclusion. "It's not happening, doc. I need this combat pay."

Without another word she rose to her feet and stamped out. She didn't even acknowledge the pretty young receptionist that bid her a good night. Instead, she burst through the large double doors and into the night. It was raining hard and it matted her hair against her face. Bearing left, she ignored the icy water against bare skin and clothing, instead reaching up to wipe away the tears from her eyes. Always cry in the rain, her father told her, its perfect camouflage.

She needed a drink. Bad. Looking around she spied the small establishment across the road. _Lou's Bar_ flashed in a pinkish blue fluorescent sign. The 'L' was in the form of a woman's bare leg with an indistinguishable high-heeled shoe on the foot of it. Forcing a smile, she crossed the street and prepared her credit chip and military identification.

It was going to be a good long night.

0000000000000000000000

**Raines P. Amanda, ONI**

_"You play a dangerous game, agent." _

_ Amanda shifted her focus back onto the centermost of the room. She stood directly under a beam of light just large enough to illuminate herself clearly. Out of the beam it was pitch dark and even her eyes couldn't adjust. She surmised there were three people sitting before her judging from the frequency of the movements and whisperings. Two males and one female, if she had guessed correctly, but she didn't dare to ask or step out of the safety of the light - creatures worse than ONI Spooks no doubt lay past the bright shield of artificial sun. "It's no game," She said impassively. "This is for the good of humanity."_

_ There was a saying in the military that if you didn't know somebody's rank it was safe to assume you better stand at attention anyway. So she did, and for the entirety of the small meeting she had yet to be dismissed to parade rest. "Killing our soldiers is for the good of humanity? For an experiment that may yet fail?" This time it was the shrouded woman that spoke. Her tone feigned disbelief, although Amanda knew it was to mock her. Nobody in this room gave two shits about anyone but themselves._

_ "If it fails than it fails." She almost shrugged before thinking better of it. "It wouldn't be the first time ONI sacrificed lives."_

_ Scoffs proceeded. Again, it was simply to mock her. To cause a rise

in her stoic persona, perhaps. "Never to this magnitude." The first man chirped. He was elderly by what his voice indicated, but the opposing two seemed as young as Amanda. "You're insinuating we allow thousands of people to die? What if your weapon fails? What if you can't control it?"_

_ She bristled silently. "All tests show a green light in every sector. There is no reason to believe we won't be able to completely control it."Almost as an afterthought, she added: "Sacrifice a few lives to win a war, and save billions of others. Surely all of you can see the credibility in that."_

_ Whispers began to echo throughout the room as the three silently congregated on what should be done. After a tense minute or so the elderly man cleared his throat. "Very well," She could almost see his frail outline wave the other two off with a dismissive hand gesture. "The Admiral of the ship will be evacuated his family and requisition another ship to command. We will leave it up to you to convince him to keep his mouth shut, or we'll be finding a new agent in addition to an Admiral." _

_ Finally, she allowed herself to smile. "Of course."_

_ "The Red Sonja is yours. Dismissed."_

0000000000000000000000000000 00000

****Whoo! Things are heating up! Sorry for the slow first few chapters. I like to build up the story and offer a bit of character development before jumping straight into the action. As usual, please read and review! I'd really appreciate it if you did so! :D****

3. Final Night

****Chapter 3****

****Heya! Thanks for the review, FalloutRanger! I appreciate it so much! That's what I was going for with Skyler, and Trisha for that matter. I was trying to make them as believable characters as possible :D To answer your question it is supposed to be taking place late 2527. Still at the beginning of the war where the UNSC is racing to find a weapon to end it quickly. (At least I presume someone would be.)****

00000000000000

**Sparks E. Skyler, Private**

The bar stank of sweat, sex, and booze. It was a rather potent mix to some and disgusting to most others, including women. The odor never deterred Danny, and Skyler assumed it wouldn't, because the minute they walked in he took a wide whiff before leading them to a table directly in the center of the room. The scantily clad waitress had brought them two beers almost as soon as they'd sat down and claimed they were cute. While whatever role that played in the hasty service, the real culprit was that off duty enlisted men usually meant good tips.

"What about Jackie?" Ever since they had left the house Danny had

gone on a tangent about single women that would be aboard the UNSC _Red Sonja_. "Fifteen months is a long ass deployment, man," He had said. "Most girls put out on board regardless if they've got a boyfriend back home."

Skyler took another lengthy sip of his beer. "I'm not banging anyone from our unit." He proclaimed. The weight of losing Tiffany still wore heavy on him, but the pleasant buzz from the alcohol was enough to lighten the load. "Besides, she's like fifty."

Danny choked so hard beer might have blown straight out his nose. "Alright, fine," He finally managed to sputter after his episode. "Trisha? She's smoking hot. Plus she's single and about our age to boot." He leaned back in his seat and guzzled the remnants of his beverage before waving the waitress over for another.

"She's also bat shit nuts," Skyler pointed out. "When Johnny and Stella bit the dust she just went psycho."

"Eh," Danny dismissed the subject with a wave of his free hand just as the waitress began to refill his glass. He winked at her, she giggled, and Skyler rolled his eyes. It seemed to be the trend of the night.

Both were silent as the waitress did her duty and departed. "What about you?" Skyler managed to ask after she had turned and sauntered away. He couldn't help but watch as she went. "Been getting any lately?"

Danny's pupils glistened and Skyler immediately regretted his question. Sometimes the man was just too much for him. "Hell yes I have. Chicks are _crazy_ about enlisted men. One look and their panties are down, dude."

The information caused Skyler to chuckle as he looked around. A small group of retired naval officers sat in one corner with their old Admiral uniforms donned laughing and reminiscing. Probably some sort of reunion. On the opposite side of the room a few local farm boys were making whistles and cat calls at the waitresses, but other than that the place could have passed as closed. He drained the last bit of beer and waved another waitress over. "Hey, hun," She flashed both a smile. He didn't know if the alcohol was the reason or not, but she looked _very_ appealing right then and there. Odd, considering she had three dirty mugs balanced on a tray in one hand and the other wrestling out a small notepad from her pocket. Behind her left ear was a black pen that was nearly invisible among the loose strands of dark hair. "Another beer? Or something else y'all need?"

Her accent was probably what got him the most. His mouth opened but nothing came out. Unfortunately Danny quickly caught wind and roared back laughing. "You'll have to excuse my friend here." He stood up from his seat and wrapped an arm over Skyler's shoulders. "Recently got out of a blood sucking relationship and it's just been _so long_ since he got to talk to such a stunning woman as you."

Skyler shot him a glare but he ignored it. The waitress giggled and did a little half spin. "Gosh, y'all really think so? That's sweet of your friend."

Red hinted at his cheeks and he slumped in his seat. Danny receded

back to his own chair and the waitress looked at him expectantly. "Yea, another beer would be great." He said.

"Make it two!" Danny called after her before she disappeared behind the bar. He gave Skyler a mischievous grin. "You like her?"

He merely shrugged in response. "She's hot."

"So is Trisha," Danny retorted.

"I'm not banging the medic."

Danny flew his arms up in the air in mock exasperation. "Come on, man. Take one for the team! She could slip us some extra morphine on the down low." He leaned back again and sniffed. "Besides, I bet she wouldn't be so crazy if she had a good lay."

It was hard to disagree with that. Lack of sex often led to irritability on deployments. It was good stress relief if anything else. "Why don't you bang her?"

"Can't," Both his hands locked behind his head sheepishly. "I'm totally not her type. Trust me, I've tried."

Skyler's brow furrowed. "If you aren't her type than how the hell am I?"

He heaved a heavy sigh, like he was talking to a toddler that never followed directions properly. "Dude, I'm the best shot in the company with my MA5B. Outgoing, I've got a killer personality. She seems like the type to bang people that aren't better than she is."

Skyler didn't know whether he should take that as an insult or not. Soon enough Danny's jovial grin told him everything he needed to know. "You're telling me I'm not as good as some chick that has almost zero friends in the entire unit and spends her leave alone in an apartment?"

"Well, you're just as hot as her. If I were a chick I'd bang you."

Skyler deadpanned and Danny recoiled with laughter. By that time the waitress had returned with two more beers. "Here you go, boys," She hummed quietly to herself as she retrieved the empty ones and set off again.

"Dude," Skyler took a long gulp and leaned forward. "You're so fucking gay, did you know that?"

Both laughed this time and toasted to a safe deployment. "I don't know how you did it, man," Danny finally stopped avoiding the subject. "Tiffany must have really dug you if she followed you around this long. That or the sex was great. But I doubt that."

Skyler stared into the murky contents of his beverage before grunting. "I don't know either," He admitted. "I know I went wrong somewhere. I just wish I could take it back."

The series of bells that were hung above the door warned of a new arrival when it opened. Skyler didn't bother to look over his

shoulder at whoever it was, but Danny's face lit up. "Dude," He whispered. "Promise me you'll bang the chick that just walked through the door."

Curiosity now adequately piqued, Skyler twisted his neck to see who had meandered in. "No way," He groaned. The butt of quite a few of the duo's jokes for the night was standing sopping wet inside the doorway. Contrary to her compatriots, she had civilian clothes on, and briskly made her way towards the bar. Skyler and Danny watched in stupefied horror and amusement.

"Watch this," Danny gently punched him on the shoulder before emitting a sharp whistle. "Hey, Bannerman!" He shouted and began to stand up again, one arm flailing in the air.

Skyler fought the urge to leap over the table and gag him. "Dude shut the fuck up!" He hissed. "She's fucking crazy!"

It was too late. The damage had been done and Trisha turned her attention towards both of them. Water droplets trailed her every step she took like some sort of psycho mermaid. "Hey Danny," She smiled at him, and nodded to Skyler. "Skyler,"

Danny was out of his seat in a flash. "Trisha," He grabbed hold of her arm and led her to his seat. "Sit, please. Have a drink with us. We were just celebrating the next deployment tomorrow."

Skyler simply acknowledged her presence with a small nod. When she sat down Danny quickly procured another chair from a nearby table and took his seat between the two. An awkward silence cropped up, and Trisha cleared her throat. "So how have you two been?"

Danny decided to answer for both of them. Just as well, Skyler silently opted out of any indirect conversation as soon as she had been invited to join them. "Just living up the last night of leave," He took a long sip of his drink before offering it to her. "What about you?"

She gulped down the remaining booze in three solid seconds. Skyler was surprised and mortified. The glass was still three quarters full when Danny had passed it on. "Just got out of another psych eval," She explained. "Fuckin' blew hard."

"Speaking of blowing hardâ€¦" Danny trailed off and dared a look in Skyler's direction. "Sparkles here just got his ass dumped by Tiffany. Total sob story."

If looks could kill the loudmouthed marine would lay twitching on the floor. "Ouch," Trisha winced and offered a sympathetic once-over. "You holding up okay?"

"Yea," He answered and pushed his beer aside. "The deployment will take my mind off things for a while."

She nodded and padded her fingers against the table. "I'm just excited to get off this rock. One more appointment with my psychiatrist and I think I might go crazy."

Skyler bit back a retort and Danny chuckled. "Docs here that bad?" He motioned the nearest waitress over with the waggle of a finger.

She answered with a careless nod. When the waitress skipped over Danny ordered another round, on him of course. The pretty dark haired woman gave Skyler a final smile before bouncing off to fill their order. "She likes you," Trisha said matter-of-factly.

Danny nodded his agreement in the middle of a long drink. "She's right," He slammed the mug onto the table. "Go get laid, Sparky."

"No way," Skyler's hand rose to cover his mouth as he yawned. "How do you guys know she likes me?"

Danny immediately turned towards Trisha. The man himself had no idea if the accusation was true; any reason to put his best friend in a situation that would embarrass him was good enough to agree with whatever the Lance Corporal suggested. "Woman's intuition," She answered. "Trust me. You could tap that."

The remainder of the night was pretty back and forth. Danny and Trisha urged Skyler to 'go for the gold' repeatedly, which only earned a few expletives and haughty remarks from the opposing marine in their direction. As more alcohol came and went, Skyler found himself warming up to Trisha. It was probably the booze again, but, ever so slowly did the trio begin laughing at past deployments, toasting fallen comrades and eagerly talking about the possible happenings of the numerous days to follow.

0000000000000000000000000000 0000

**Raines P. Amanda, ONI**

The room was easier on the eyes than the last two she had been in, that much was obvious. The Admiral had offered her safe haven in one of the two very comfortable looking chairs directly opposite of his desk. She had declined. "Soâ€|" Her attention snapped back onto man. He was young for his rank. A full head of sleek black hair had only begun to become contaminated with a few strands of gray. It was a testament to his amiable skill, no doubt, or merely his ability to step on the right toes for the right rank. "Go over it one more time with me, Spook, please."

Amanda didn't answer at first, merely watched as he poured himself another small glass of bourbon. The scent assaulted her nostrils and she twitched her nose. "The tests will begin as soon as the ship leaves planetary orbit. My men and I have full access to every camera angle on this ship. Should the test prove successful, we will move in to retrieve Subject B." She paused. "Easy, and you get out alive."

She had only scratched the surface, she knew. She could talk for hours upon ours about the project. Unfortunately, it was all on a need to know basis, and the Admiral didn't technically need to know anything. "I see," He rocked back and forth in his chair. "And I'm just supposed to keep my mouth shut? What am I going to say when only I, my wife, and my daughter made it out? What do I put in my report?"

"_We'll deal with the report. You just keep your mouth shut for both

of our sakes." She was pacing again. This time from wall to wall " inspecting the taxidermy big game animal heads hung ludicrously here and there. They added flavor to the room if anything else. "When everything goes as planned you'll have a new ship and a pay grade. Just think, If everything goes as planned when this war is over you may even be accredited with the research and development of the weapon that destroyed the Covenant."_

His jaw worked from side to side. Amanda smirked. He had made up his mind. "You're asking me to betray my men and their families. That's over a thousand people." It was all a show at this point, to plead how human he was. For his sake or hers she did not know. It was amusing.

Her hand gently rubbed the snout of a particularly large lion's head. "Think of it as one big safari for your men."

00000000000000000000

** Review please! Next chapter things really get interesting!**

End
file.